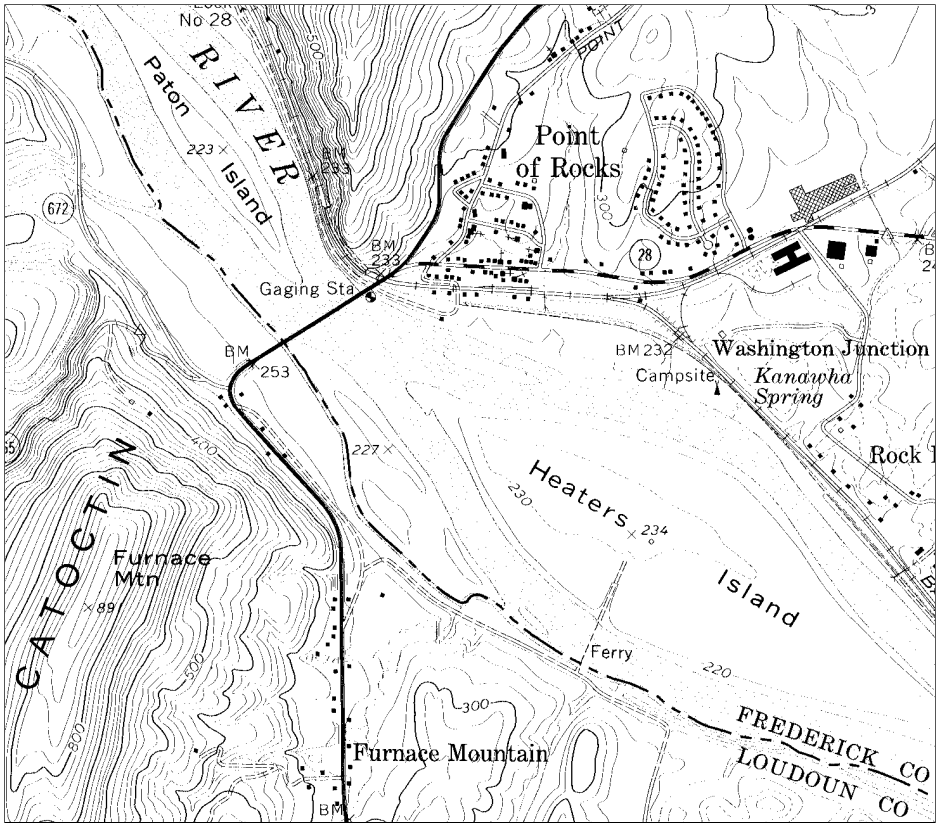
Geographic Names Information System

The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), developed by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in cooperation with the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, contains information about the proper names for places, features, and areas in the Nation. This information is available for the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the territories and outlying areas of the United States, as well as for Antarctica. The GNIS consists of four separate data bases: the National Geographic Names Data Base (NGNDB), the Antarctica Geographic Names Data Base (AGNDB), the Geographic Cell Names Data Base (GCNDB - formerly the Topographic Map Names Data Base, TMNDB), and the Reference Data Base (RDB).



Section from a 7.5-minute topographic map of Point of Rocks, Md.-Va.

The NGNDB contains records on almost 2 million geographic names in the United States - from populated places, schools, reservoirs, and parks to streams, valleys, springs, ridges, and every feature type except roads and highways. Entries include information such as the federally recognized name for the feature; former names, as well as variant spellings of the official name; the status of the names as determined by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names; the county or counties in which each named feature is located; the geographic coordinates (in degrees, minutes, and seconds, as well as decimal degrees) that locate the approximate center of an areal feature or the mouth and source of a linear feature such as a stream; and the name(s) of the USGS cell(s) (topographic map(s)) on which the feature may appear. Elevation, extent, and historical information are available for some features. Abibliographic code referring to the source of information for feature names in the data base is also available. Data from the NGNDB are used in emergency preparedness, mapmaking, local and regional planning, service delivery routing, marketing, site selection, environmental analysis, and genealogical research, as well as in other applications. Data from the NGNDB can also be incorporated into other data bases.

Data for each State or territory are compiled in two phases. The first phase, which is complete for States and areas under U.S. jurisdiction, entailed the collection of most feature names printed on the 1:24,000-scale topographic maps published by the USGS and the U.S. Forest Service, as well as on the charts of the Office of Coast Survey. The second phase is a long-term project to gather additional names information from State and local materials and from a wide variety of historical documents. This project is being accomplished on a State-by-State basis.

The Antarctica Geographic Names Data Base (AGNDB) contains names approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names for features in Antarctica and the area extending northward to the Antarctic Convergence. Included in this geographic area are the off-lying South Shetland Islands, South Orkney Islands, South Sandwich Islands, South Georgia, Bouvetøya, Heard Island, and Balleny Islands. Much of the interior of Antarctica is a featureless ice plateau that is nearly devoid of toponyms. All of the names are for natural features, such as mountains, glaciers, peninsulas, capes, bays, islands, and subglacial entities. The names of scientific stations have not been included at this time, but they may appear in the texts of some entries.

The GCNDB contains the official name for each U.S. Geological Survey cell (map series). These map series are as follows:

- 7.5 x 7.5 minutes
- 15 x 15 minutes
- 30 minutes x 1 degree
- 7.5 x 15 minutes
- 30 x 30 minutes
- 2 degrees x 1 degree
- 1 degree x 2 degrees

The RDB is designed for use as a research and reference tool as well as being a repository of reference information for the GNIS. The information in the RDB contains the complete annotated bibliographies of all source material used in the compiling of the NGNDB.

Responses to special requests for GNIS digital reports are available through file traansfer protocol (FTP). Standard State and territory digital gazetteers are also now available for downloading at the GNIS Web site by anonymous FTP. Standard digital reports are in ASCII character code and are fixed-field-length format with a record length of 240. The standard State and territory format includes feature name, feature type, county, primary geographic coordinates (center or mouth), source geographic coordinates (linear features), elevation (if available), and cell (topographic map) name. Special topical files are also available at this site and include Populated Places (a listing of all populated place records in the NGNDB for the United States), Concise (major features), and Historical (features that no longer exist).

GNIS on CD-ROM

The GNIS CD-ROM contains four data bases:

1. The National Geographic Names Data Base (NGNDB) contains almost 2 million entries for areas in and under the jurisdiction of the United States.

2. The Antarctica Geographic Names Data Base (AGNDB) contains names approved by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names for features in Antarctica and the area extending northward to the Antarctic Convergence.

3. The Geographic Cell Names Data Base contains current cell names and historical cell names, which are bases for most USGS topographic maps.

4. The Reference Data Base (RDB) is a collection of bibliographic codes and annotated bibliographies of all sources used in compiling information for the NGNDB.

Each record in the NGNDB, AGNDB, and GCNDB can contain various location and description fields. All can be displayed, and most can be searched. Not all fields, however, contain data. The RDB contains two fields, bibliography and bibliographic code.

The following fields in the NGNDB can be searched: State, feature name, feature type, county name, cell (topographic map) name, variant name, national forest name, geographic coordinates, source coordinates, elevation, bibliographic reference code, and population (for incorporated entities). The display-only fields are State/county Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) code, history, description, status, decision list, and record entry date. The following fields in the AGNDB can be searched: feature name, feature type, elevation (meters), geographic coordinates, variant name, and description (includes history and name origin). The following fields in the GCNDB can be searched: State, cell (topographic map) name, reference coordinate, map scale, map reference code, county name, and history. One field is for display only and represents the percentage of the map in the county. Data contained in this field, however, have not been verified and should be used with caution and only as a general reference.

The CD-ROM contains software for searching, sorting, displaying, printing, and exporting the data, as well as relevant help screens. The software must be installed onto a hard disk before the data can be used. The CD-ROM, accompanied by a users manual titled “GNIS Digital Gazetteer,” can be purchased for $57, plus a $5 handling charge per order mailed.

Each CD-ROM requires an IBM PC-XT-AT or compatible microcomputer with 512 K of memory and a DOS operating system version 3.0 or greater, 20 Mb of available hard-drive space, and a CD-ROM reader with software drivers that read ISO-9660 formatted CD-ROM’s.

Information

For more information on the GNIS or on individual State and territory data base file status, contact:

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The address for the GNIS home page is http://mapping.usgs.gov/www/gnis/.

For ordering information for the GNIS CD-ROM and other GNIS products, contact any Earth Science Information Center (ESIC) or telephone 1-800-USA-MAPS.

For information on other USGS products and services, call 1-800-USA-MAPS, use the EARTHFAX fax-on-demand system, which is available 24 hours a day at 703-648-4888, or visit the general interest publications website at http://mapping.usgs.gov/www/products/mappubs.html.

Please visit the USGS home page at http://www.usgs.gov/.